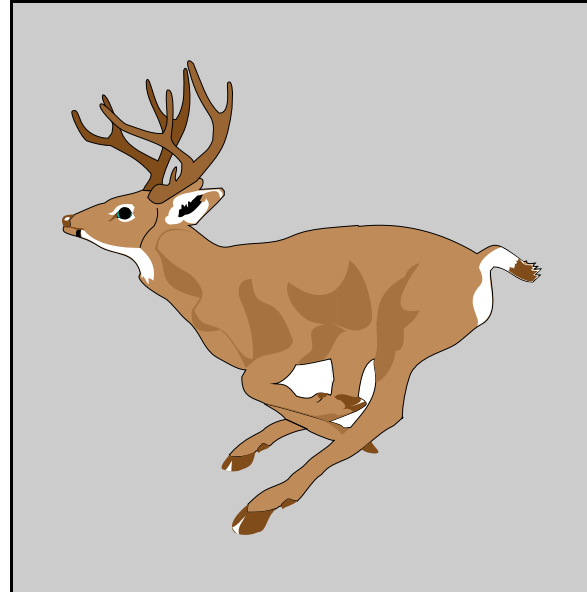


CHAPTER 1

Issues and Concerns

The Bureau of Land Management, cooperating with Northern Arizona University's (NAU School of Forestry), studied the Grand Junction Resource Area's Ruby Canyon and Black Ridge (RCBR) area during 1992 and 1993. The goals of the study were to 1) provide managers with baseline information on area visitors, 2) identify perceptions of various user groups regarding benefits derived from this area, and 3) identify perception of community leaders regarding benefits derived from this area. Three methods were used to obtain this information. First, an on-site visitor survey was conducted during 1992 and 1993 at various locations in the RCBR area; second, members of various users participated in focus groups to identify and discuss benefits of the RCBR area; and third, a sample of community leaders of Grand Junction were surveyed.



Community Interests and Concerns

Fifty community leaders from both the private and public sectors representing diverse interests were contacted and surveyed regarding how they felt the RCBR area contributed to Grand Junction and its residents. The survey found that community leaders felt the RCBR provides a variety of benefits for the Grand Junction community. The most important benefits they identified were: 1) maintaining an outdoor-oriented lifestyle, 2) a feeling Grand Junction is a special place to live, 3) the appeal of Grand Junction as a tourism attraction, 4) opportunities for exercise that can improve the health of the local people, 5) a greater understanding of the natural environment, and 6) a greater concern for the natural environment.

Some of the benefits provided by specific zones within the RCBR area include: Rabbit Valley and Mary's and Lions Loops are valued as recreation areas; Ruby Canyon, Colorado River and Canyons are valued as wilderness areas, and Rattlesnake Canyon and the Arches are valued as a tourist attraction.

Satisfaction with the BLM, its personnel and management of the RCBR is quite high among community leaders (average score of 5.88 on a scale of 1 to 7). The leaders felt there was room for improvement in caring for visitors and in the areas ability to handle an increase in tourism activity. Management suggestions given included: 1) increasing BLM's cooperation with other agencies and community groups, 2) improving education efforts directed towards visitors, 3) intensifying enforcement and management, and 4) increasing limits and controls on various user groups.

Issues Identification With All Partners

Issues, concerns and desired benefits from all other partners, visitors, and user groups were gathered from the visitor survey and focus groups interviews. User groups interviewed included the jeep users, archaeologists, the horse club, Sierra Club/Audubon Society, river runners, motorcycle users, mountain bikers, and gem and mineral enthusiasts during focus group sessions. These groups were asked what individual benefits they realized while recreating in the RCBR area. They were also asked what they thought land managers could do better to help them realize these benefits.

The visitor survey provided additional information on user desires for certain recreation experiences and benefits as well as identifying problems and the desirability of a range of management actions.

Issues Relating To Archaeological-Historical-Paleontological Resources

Many archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources exist throughout the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge area. The bulk of these resources have yet to be discovered and documented. An increasing resource database is needed for managing their preservation and appropriate uses for the benefit of the American public.

Numerous prehistorical and historical Native Americans once moved through and inhabited the area leaving behind evidence of their cultures. Ranching, mining, railroading, and other livelihoods produced remains indicative of the historical uses of the area. Many dinosaur and other fossils, found in the area's geologic formations, have of local to international importance based on their scientific, educational, and recreational values.

The protection and appropriate use of archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources in the area are important management issues. Concerns include consideration and protection of these resources in all management actions. This is best done through use of surveys, databases and sensitivity screening maps that display areas suspected of containing significant cultural and paleontological resources. Important resources should be removed from mineral entry and the BLM should continue working with partnerships and networking with the stakeholders to help educate the public about the protection and appropriate uses of these resources.

Preservation and protection are valid concepts in dealing with archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources for the public benefit. Scientifically-significant collections should be made by authorized permits, and BLM should encourage and facilitate research whenever possible. Researchers should provide a return to the American public, as legal and appropriate, about the results of such research and how it enriches our knowledge.

From much of this knowledge of located archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources, opportunities for interpretation of these resources need to be further funded and made available. Educational and recreational uses of these resources need to be maintained in appropriate and sustainable ways for the public benefit.

Issues Relating to Vegetation, Soil, Water and Air, and Wildlife

Vegetation

The major issue concerning vegetation was to maintain or attain healthy vegetation communities that: enhance ecological processes, provide stable watersheds, ensure a rural environment, meet the needs of livestock and wildlife including threatened and endangered species, and provide an aesthetically pleasing environment. These cannot be provided on every acre of land but should be provided on an overall landscape basis. Along the Colorado River a big concern is to retain native plant communities which are threatened by the invasion of exotic plants and the loss of cottonwood galleries.

Soil, Water and Air

The main issue centered around properly functioning watersheds. If a watershed is in properly functioning condition it would provide for reduced soil erosion and protect water and air quality. The key to watershed condition will be how the vegetative communities are managed.

Wildlife

1. How can impacts of recreational use be minimized on rare plants, wildlife species (desert bighorn)?
2. How can the area be used to educate the public in the enjoyment of and concern for the ecology of arid environments?
3. How can the endangered species in Ruby Canyon be best protected?
4. How can the desert bighorn sheep be the key management species of wildlife south of the Colorado River?
5. What can be done to actively improve wildlife habitat in the area and perhaps get populations high enough to make hunting an attractive pursuit?